Barrie as a Poet

IN "The World of Letters as Others See It," in the issue of May 21, we quoted a paragraph from the London *Times*, which spoke of Sir James Barrie being unknown as a poet, despite his verses on the death of Stevenson. Stevenson died in December, 1894, and the verses were printed simultaneously in the English *Bookman* and the American *Bookman* for February, 1895. Incidentally, it was the first number issued of the American *Bookman*, and the poem was the opening feature of the magazine that is now published by the George H. Doran Company and edited by Mr. John Farrar. Probably very few American readers recall it. For the benefit of those who love the memory of "R. L. S." and of those who love the work of the creator of "Peter Pan" we reprint the poem, which was called "Scotland's Lament."—Editor Book Section.

Her hands about her brow are pressed,
  She goes upon her knees to pray,
Her head is bowed upon her breast,
  And, oh, she's sairly failed the day!

Her breast is old, it will not rise,
  Her tearless sobs in anguish choke,
God put his finger on her eyes,
  And then it was her tears that spoke.

"I've ha'en o'brawer sons a flow,
  My Walter mair renown could win,
And he that followed at the plough,
  But Louis was my Benjamin!

"Ye sons wha do your little best,
  Ye writing Scots, put by the pen,
He's deid, the ane abune the rest,
  I winna look to write again!

"It's sune the leave their childhood drap,
  "I've ill to ken them, gane sae grey,
But aye he climbed intil my lap,
  Or pu'd my coats to mak me play.

"He egged me on with mirth or prank,
  We hangit gowans on a string,
We made the doakens walk the plank,
  We mairit snails without the ring.

"'I'm auld,' I pant, 'sic ploys to mak,
  To games your mither shouldna stoup.'
'You're gey and auld,' he cries me back,
  'That's for I lak to gar you loup!'

"O' thae bit ploys he made sic books,
  A mither's cam to watch us playing;
I feigned no to heed their looks,
  But fine I kent waht they was saying!

"At times I lent him for a game
  To north and south and east and west,
But no for lang, he sune cam hame,
  For here it was he played the best.

"And when he had to cross the sea,
  He wouldna let his een grow dim,
He bravely dreed his weird for me,
  I tried to do the same for him.

"Ahint his face his pain was sair,
  Ahint hers grat his waefu' mither,
We kent that we should meet nae mair,
  The ane saw easy thro' the ither.

"For lang I've watched wi' trembling lip,
  But Louis ne'er sin syne I've seen,
The greedy island keept its grip,
  The cauldriff oceans rolled atween.

"He's deid, the ane abune the rest,
  Oh, wae, the mither left alane!
He's deid, the ane I looed the best,
  Oh, mayna I hae back my nain!"

Her breast is old, it will not rise,
  Her tearless sobs in anguish choke,
God put his finger on her eyes,
  It was her tears alone that spoke.

Now out the lights went stime by stime,
  The towns crept closer round the kirk,
Now all the firths were smoored in rime,
  Lost winds went wailing through the mirk.

A star that shot across the night
  Struck fire on Pala's mourning head,
And left for aye a steadfast light,
  By which the mother guards her dead.

"The lad was mine!" Erect she stands,
  No more by vain regrets opprest,
Once more her eyes are clear; her hands
  Are proudly crossed upon her breast.

The Aroma of Stevenson

EVERY now and then critics have been moved to write something plaintively derogatory to the literary fame of Robert Louis Stevenson, sometimes half apologetically, yet as if pricked by the spur of duty; not so often as if irritated by some vaporous mystery about him of which others were sensible but of which they could only hear the Talk.

In the London *Mercury* Mr. John Freeman turns again to the theory of "the Stevenson myth"—a phrase which carries an implication of magistral dominance—and studies it at some length, with a long look at the conflict between the artist and the novelist in Stevenson. And while he is looking he sees a ghost—the ghost of Poe looking over Stevenson's shoulder, as if the American had felt himself summoned by somebody's thought, but had found, when he came, that nobody had thought of him, and that Stevenson, too, had answered the call (if there had been any call) and that "Olalla" and "Markheim" and "The Body Snatcher" and passages in some of the novels were the incantation which had sounded in the dead ear of Poe. Mr. Freeman, of course, does not hint that Stevenson borrowed from Poe, merely suggesting that he "shared Poe's delight in the macabre, using familiar traditions for the creation of physical horror"; and he thinks he rather boggled his work in that direction.

In comment upon another flash of Stevenson's spirit, what seems rather a queerer conclusion is drawn. Stevenson's own criticism of "the choice of a wrong key of detail or style" (as shown by a phrase in "Prince Otto") is cited as "an admirable comment, to which it is hard to add more than a word in saying that 'Prince Otto' is Stevenson's chief, if not sole, essay in sentimentalism, and that neither character nor incident yields satisfaction in its pages."

Mr. Freeman's acute analysis of Stevenson's varied performances and his clear perception of his hills and valleys are pervaded with such a generous, almost wistful, spirit that one could wish, for his sake, that he had not missed—as he seems to have missed—something in "Prince Otto" which is surely of its essence. To say, and to stop with saying, that "neither character nor incident yields satisfaction" in its reading is to allow what may be called (in contemporary lingo) the "astral" quality to escape. It was the Ariel in Stevenson who wrote that wonderful fairy story which was, unless this guess is far out and wide, the spring and source of all the race of romantic (if sentimental) tales, from the "Prisoner of Zenda" onward and down through ten years of English story telling. Fantastic, ethereal, cloudy, almost formless, through and out of it floated that very spirit of "The True Romance" to which was made the lofty ascription:

"Who art in sooth the happy truth
  The careless angels know."

This kindly commentator gropes to his regretful conclusion that "it is only in part from his own work that the bright myth has sprung; its true life is lived in the memory of those that knew him in the flesh or in the spirit." If indeed the contemporary mind is insensitive to the quite intangible but intensely real enjoyment which comes just as often in rereading as it did in the first sight of those feathery formulas which made wings for his literary frameworks, much of pure pleasure is lost, even if the pleasure were partly the reader's unconscious cooperation and fusion with the writer's words. There was a certain quality of the beauty of a butterfly's wing about much of his legacy as it was treasured away. If anything of its coloring or delicacy has disappeared, not to be made visible to the holder of the reading glass to-day, one is persuaded of another faded beauty of the time before the world became so filled with weights and measures.

The Dead Men's Chanty

By MICHAEL MONAHAN.

THERE may have been more important literary discoveries than the revelation, quite recent, of the identity of the man who wrote that ripping piratical blood-boltered ballad, "Fifteen Men on the Dead Man's Chest." Certainly there has been none that excited a more genuine "thrill" of interest among the true *cognoscenti*. I do not refer merely to the original gruesome quatrain quoted in R. L. Stevenson's "Treasure Island":

Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
Drink and the devil had done for the rest—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!

but rather and moreover, to the elaborate piece of rhythmic deviltry evolved and educed and exstructed therefrom by a long unknown or, at any rate, unaccredited hand. Here follows the sanguine sonata alluded to—an impeccable text favored with the latest revision of the only true and genuine author.

Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
Drink and the devil had done for the rest—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
The mate was fixed by the bos'n's pike,
  The bos'n brained with a marlin-spike,
And Cookey's throat was marked belike.
    It had been gripped
      By fingers ten;
    And there they lay,
      All good dead men,
Like break-o'-day in a boozing-ken—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!

Fifteen men of a whole ship's list—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
Dead and bedamned, and the rest gone whist!—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
The skipper lay with his nob in gore
  Where the scullion's ax his cheek had shore—
And the scullion he was stabbed times four.
    And there they lay,
      And the soggy skies
    Dripped all day long
      In up-staring eyes—
At murk sunset and at foul sunrise—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!

Fifteen men of 'em stiff and stark—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
Ten of the crew had the murder mark—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
'Twas a cutlass swipe, or an ounce of lead,
  Or a yawing hole in a battered head—
And the scuppers glut with a rotting red.
    And there they lay—
      Aye, damn my eyes!—
    All lookouts clapped
      On paradise—
All souls bound just contrariwise—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!

Fifteen men of 'em good and true—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
Every man jack could ha' sailed with Old Pew—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
There was chest on chest full of Spanish gold,
  With a ton of plate in the middle hold,
And the cabin's riot of stuff untold.
    And they lay there
      That had took the plum,
    With sightless glare
      And their lips struck dumb,
While we shared all by the rule of thumb—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!

* * *

The history of this poem illustrates anew the fallibility of human evidence and the tenuous character of human veracity. It has been traveling the rounds of the newspaper and so-called literary press, pawed over by editors and copyreaders, sniffed at by office critics and regarded with mixed favor and distrust by "literary" printers, during a matter of twenty-five odd years. There has been a considerable variation of text, since everybody wants to "improve," and thereby claim something in an anonymous masterpiece.

I can't understand why there should ever have been any mystery or question about its authorship, unless the poet was for a long time indifferent to caveat or judged that a temporary sequestration of his title would redound to his greater ultimate fame. At any rate, these circumstances have given full play to the invention of fakers, the "pipes" of well meaning hallucinants, and the painful ingenuity of those who weave literary mare's nests.

A fabrication of the latter sort deceived the critical *Hawkshaw* of a New York paper into swallowing a yarn about the poem (found, as alleged, in an "old scrapbook") having been sung as a chanty by English buccaneers in the Caribbean, say a century ago. The literary *Hawkshaw* was taken in so completely that subsequent admission of his error, upon an unanswerable presentation of the real facts, was not easily wrung from him—there is nothing like a Texas mule or a literary expert for a certain kind of opinionative contumaciousness. Howbeit, the laurel of "The Dead Men's Song" has now finally been placed upon the modest yet Jovian brow of Mr. Young E. Allison, a veteran journalist of Louisville, Ky. Or to speak with allowable metaphor, that rakish craft, the "Derelict," with her papers finally cleared and her true skipper on board, now stands out to sea for the long voyage!

This same Allison ought to be a man delightfully worth knowing, to judge from a certain tall red-and-green volume of appreciation in his honor put forth in a privately published edition by his friend Champion Ingraham Hitchcock, also of Louisville. The book fully establishes Mr. Allison's claim to the parentage of the truculent *chef-d'oeuvre* so long disputed about and errantly fathered, and also raises the wonder that he should have been content with having once miraculously centred the bullseye of literary achievement. However, according to a famous French critic, the man who produces only one masterpiece—be it only a single page of perfect prose or verse—has a better chance of future fame than the author of many volumes indifferently good. Indeed fame seems to have made a special provision for carrying the monopoematic genius, as a search of the anthologies will readily disclose. In its peculiar class Allison's poem is as memorable as Poe's "Raven"—and I can see him still steering that sullen "Derelict" of his upon future seas, not a wave of which will be hazarded by many admired literary cockboats of the present time.

This, I am proud to advance, was also the view of the late Mr. James Whitcomb Riley (an undoubted Immortal), who in a letter to the present writer coined an inspired word, "delishamous," to express his pleasure in the poem, and who has elsewhere characterized it as a "masterly and exquisite ballad of delicious horificness." A tribute which, failing all other indorsement, would send the "Derelict" a long way on her cruise to the future.

In a copy of the book mentioned above, presented to a certain person, Mr. Riley has inscribed this characteristic verse of appreciation (ah, collectors! wouldn't ye like to set gloating? lamps upon it?—Hold off!—your pieces of eight shall not tempt me.):

Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
Young E. Allison done all the rest—
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
He's sung this song for you and me,
  Jest as it wuz—or it ort to be—
Clean through time and eternity.
  Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!

Punch and England's Men of Letters

Continued from Preceding Page.

he contributed to *Once a Week*. But he was not exempt from criticism on that account. In 1894 he was burlesqued in a parody of "Lord Ormont and His Aminta," which ran through three numbers and was ornamented with a portrait of the author as a bull in the china shop of syntax, grammar and form. *Punch* in middle age, says Mr. Graves, only dimly appreciated Meredith's genius, and was disconcerted by his obscurity. *Punch* erred in good company, for Tennyson is reported to have said that "Reading Meredith is like wading through glue."

IV.

There was never any perceptible change in *Punch's* attitude toward the æsthetes. It deplored in the early nineties the movement in the direction of unrestrained self-expression in literature which had its outcome in the *Yellow Book* and the *Savoy* and which avowed its loyalty to Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine. *Punch* held that the movement was wholly decadent. It printed the lines to "Any Boy-Poet of the Decadence":

For your dull little vices we don't care a fig,
  It is this that we deeply deplore:
You were cast for a common or usual pig,
  But you play the invincible bore.

In one common anathema *Punch* confounded all the contributors to the *Yellow Book* and the *Savoy*. The former, with an illustration by "Daubaway Weirdsley" and "Max," as "Max Mereboom" was held up to especial ridicule in 1895. In 1896 the *Savoy* became the "Saveloy," with imaginary extracts and further attacks on Max Mereboom, Simple Symons and Weirdsley.

In the early nineties were the *Punch* parodies of Conan Doyle's "Sherlock Holmes," and of Benson's "Dodo." The latter was particularly effective. It began with: "Sling me over a two eyed steak, Bill," said Bobo. In the sequel the Marquis of Cokaleek, the noble unappreciated husband, is killed in the hunting field, but Bobo does not marry Bill, her fancy man. She jilts him and "got herself married to an Austrian Prince at half an hour's notice by the A. of C." It was *Punch* that was responsible for the much quoted saying which first appeared in 1894, that the "modern novel is a blend of the Erotic, the Neurotic and the Tommyrotic."

In view of George du Maurier's long service "Trilby" was treated with benevolence, though *Punch* regretted the theological interludes. About the same time the paper was enthusiastic in its welcome to Anthony Hope Hawkins's "The Prisoner of Zenda," and its sequel, "Rupert of Hentzau." In these novels it saw a healthy antidote to the ultra-realistic. But in 1896 it described the later manner of Henry James as "indifferent Trollopian and second class Meredithian."

MR. PUNCH'S HISTORY OF MODERN ENGLAND. In four volumes. Frederick A. Stokes Company.

NOTE.—"Mr. Punch's History of England" will be the basis of subsequent papers in THE NEW YORK HERALD book section on "*Punch* and English Society," "*Punch* and the Woman Question" and "*Punch* and the Art Eccentrics."